

Teaching

The office of the Dean of Academic Studies, headed by the Dean of Academic Studies Prof. Ophir Münz-Manor, is responsible for all university-wide and interdepartmental issues pertaining to studies at the OUI. The Office of the Dean formulates teaching policies and procedures, as well as rules and regulations that apply to students; tutorial format; procedures for opening new study groups countrywide, and the instruction and training of teaching personnel.

Three divisions operate under the auspices of the dean's office: The Department for Teaching and Learning, The Department of Academic Counseling, and the Unit for Student Retention. Together, they promote and provide teaching and learning services. Last year, 5,834 study groups were opened for 777 academic courses in 86 study centers throughout Israel.

New Study Programs

Undergraduate programs

- BA in Communication
- BSc in Physics

Graduate program

- MA in Government and Public Policy

Divisions of study

- Music Culture
- Linguistics

Teaching-certificate program

- Teaching certificate in Communication

Focus on MA Programs

MA in Government and Public Policy

The MA program in government and public policy is the first graduate program launched by the OUI since it was granted autonomy by the Council for Higher Education (CHE) to offer graduate study programs and award MA degrees. The program was offered for the first time in Fall 2020, and on 2021 will include 330 students. The program is based on the government and public policy track of the master's program in democracy studies.

The program is unique in that it is interdisciplinary, combining political science, sociology, and economics. Since

it is designed for public administration employees, especially those in local government, it offers a local government study track, and offers scholarships amounting to NIS 10,000 to students working for local authorities. Another advantage of the program is its specialized structured online study track, offered simultaneously in about twenty study groups throughout Israel. These groups, which include Wadi Ara (three groups), Shfar'am, and Eilat, help realize the OUI vision to offer accessible graduate studies to diverse populations.

MA in History

The OUI first launched its graduate program in history in the fall semester of 2018. The program introduces students to the history of different cultures and societies, and their intersection with different periods of history and varying geographic regions. Students become acquainted with the main debates over historical issues and different research methods. The program includes a theoretical track (without a thesis) and a research track, and offers three areas of study from which students may choose: multicultural history, Jewish history, and modern history of the Middle East. Students are also encouraged to choose elective courses from the other areas (in line with the rationale underlying the undergraduate program in history), and are required to take a series of joint required courses intended to create a common learning and research foundation.

Small groups (20-25 students) take part in hybrid learning, both in the classroom or remotely, on Zoom or course websites. Teaching staff are all active researchers.

In terms of 2021 enrollment, 341 students have applied for the program, of which over half are OUI graduates. Approximately 100 are currently completing prerequisites for acceptance, and 190 are current students. Two students have graduated from the theoretical track, and six have been accepted to the research track. Of these, two have already received approval for research proposals, and four are at an advanced stage of research proposal preparation.

New Courses

History, Philosophy, and Judaic Studies

Controversy and Public Debate through the Jewish Press

Epistemology: Theories of Knowledge and Faith

Nightmare or New Horizons? Historical Research in the Digital Era (MA)

Scientific Knowledge in the Muslim World (MA)

The Contents of Mental States

Transformations of Knowledge and Textual Intimacy in Jewish Culture (MA)

Women and Gender in Times of War and National Crisis: A comparative View (MA)

Language, Literature, and the Arts

Methodology of Teaching Cinema Studies in High School

Education and Psychology

Field Experience in Psychology (MA)

Occupational Therapy and Counseling: Theoretical Approaches and Applications

Management and Economics

Contemporary Issues in Human Resource Management

Impact Investment: Towards Sustainable Social Services (MA)

Sociology, Political Science, and Communication

Communication and Social and Political Discourse in Democratic Societies (MA)

Didactic Seminar in Teaching Communication

International Political Economy

Introduction to New Media

Practicum in Teaching Communication

Natural Sciences

Quantum Physics II

Teaching and Learning

The Teaching and Learning Center leads intensive university-wide latitudinal processes for promoting teaching and learning. To this end, it operates in two complementary areas: development of student learning skills, and pedagogical development of teaching.

In 2020, the department continued its efforts to enhance and revise teaching methods, and expanded the discussion of pedagogic methods suitable for the current period. This became even more important in light of the COVID-19 situation, in which the universal adjustment to online teaching has challenged the OUI with the need for immediate responses concerning students and faculty.

The division for the development of study skills has expanded the choice of online professional development workshops for faculty. It launched the Second Glance program which offers focused pedagogical consultation in various fields related to professional development and management of tutoring staff. A pilot of online teaching in regular groups was launched during the first semester of 2020, and teaching coordinators who wished to revise the instructional format in the regular groups (re-distributing session times, incorporating asynchronous resources, changing the nature of a synchronic session, etc.) were offered assistance.

The second semester of 2020 changed course with the COVID-19 outbreak, as it instantly went completely online. All frontal learning groups had to be converted into online groups, which required considerable effort on the part of all the university's administrative and academic departments at extremely short notice. The department for teaching and learning took measures to respond comprehensively to student needs, especially since many were experiencing online tutoring sessions for the first time. The sweeping shift from frontal to online teaching required the training of hundreds of tutors to teach online.

For further details, please see "Spotlight," p. 38

Another significant challenge brought about by the epidemic was the need to find alternative methods of student evaluation. This required developing replacements for frontal exams; first for the second session of first-semester exams, and then for the exams of the second and third semesters of 2020. OUI academic and administrative departments joined forces in determining guidelines for alternative evaluations. Work procedures and instructions, as well as information pertaining to the operative aspects of exams were formulated and distributed to the course coordinators and the students. In cases where frontal exams could not be replaced, solutions were found which adhered strictly to the Public Health Order and the directives of the CHE. Students studying abroad received specific instructions, including computerized solutions and adaptations of systems to correspond with the various types of evaluations. The office of the Dean of Academic Studies assisted in structuring new types of evaluations, guiding the teaching coordinators (in group and individual meetings), and writing pedagogical guidebooks and manuals for the teaching staff to help them integrate the new procedures.

While these specific COVID-based challenges were being addressed, discussions surrounding the issues of upgrading teaching and learning continued. A third Teaching and Learning Day: Connections Create Renewal focused on the ongoing efforts to promote, innovate,

and add significance to teaching and learning at the OUI. Six members of our teaching staff received the Dean of Academic Studies Prize for Initiative and Innovation in Teaching for their work.

A think-tank conference, Corona Takeaways – Post-First-Wave Teaching, Support, and Evaluation was held at the end of the second semester of 2020. This online conference yielded a summary document that included lessons and applicative insights on teaching, student support, and remote evaluation. Approximately 260 academic and administrative staff participated, and the conference received excellent feedback.

Academic Counseling

The Department of Academic Counseling serves thousands of students throughout their academic studies at the OUI. Due to the unique nature of OUI studies, the university offers targeted academic counseling intended to strengthen academic self-management skills. This is achieved by identifying needs and strengths, building trust by listening and asking questions, coordinating expectations, defining counseling products, and strengthening ties.

Academic counseling is available to students from the very first stages of planning studies for the semester or the year, choosing study subjects and building study programs, and facilitating access to university support systems. Counseling is provided face-to-face, by phone, email, or via distance technologies. Extra attention is given to special populations, such as candidates for the IDF academic program, high school students, soldiers, prison inmates, Arabic-speaking students, ultra-Orthodox students and students of Ethiopian descent. Faculty members from all OUI departments provide comprehensive academic counseling.

Similar to other fields, academic advising procedures have also undergone considerable change during the COVID-19 period. Student needs were mainly emotional,

and concerned job loss, insecurity regarding distance learning, and difficulty in managing a study routine during a time of abrupt changes in other spheres of life. Given these issues, a need for professional training was observed that would empower the students and assist them in "soft" skills such as containment and support, to help them continue studying. Moreover, a significant increase occurred in counseling via Zoom, which improved work processes and made up for the inability to hold counseling sessions in person.

Transfer Tracks

Transfer tracks allow students to begin their bachelor's degree studies in the flexible framework of the OUI's open admission policy. Successful completion of a cluster of courses (in accordance with specific requirements for each study program) allows students to complete their degree at the OUI or transfer to another university.

This year, three new transfer track options were added:

Technion:

- Information Systems Engineering
- Biomedical Engineering
- Material Engineering and Material Engineering/Biology

English Language Studies

In the 21st century, the needs of university graduates have changed, and reading comprehension is no longer sufficient for integration into the academic world, or the job market. The Council of Europe Language Policy has therefore determined new standards for language acquisition (CEFR - Common European Framework of Reference), comprising four skills: reading, writing, listening, and spoken interaction. These standards have been adapted to the Israeli context, and the CHE has announced their future implementation in all of Israel's higher education institutes.

The OUI English language unit began adapting the English language courses to the new standards, and ran several

pilots this year for integrating the four language skills at various levels of English. In the pilot, students received additional options for learning the material through questions that link the learned context with everyday life. Advanced courses also included oral presentations. New teaching aids use various applications, platforms, and software which are integrated into all the courses, aiming to boost interest and increase student retention.

Further to another decision of the CHE, participation in tutoring sessions of English language courses is now mandatory. The OUI systems have been adjusted accordingly, and now define the number of mandatory sessions in each course, and include instructions about mandatory attendance within the course requirements, the handling of exceptions, etc.

School for Local Government

The School for Local Government, founded in 2013, is a cooperative endeavor of the Federation of Local Governments and the OUI, intended to promote higher education among local government employees. To date, about 1,500 undergraduate students have studied towards bachelor's degrees in social science and the humanities, combined with a diploma in local government studies. About seventy local authorities, from Majdal Shams in the north to Eilat in the south, participate in 80 study groups.

The school establishes groups according to student need, placing special emphasis on specific topics. For example, the curriculum of an Ashdod group started in 2020 includes education courses.

In addition to undergraduate studies, approximately 100 students are enrolled in the graduate program in government and public policy.

The studies are partially financed by scholarships offered by Mifal Hapayis. In 2020, the Local Authorities Federation non-profit organization Shahar-On, which is dedicated to social and professional progress, joined in providing financial aid to students.

School of Public Policy

The School of Public Policy For Civil Servants was founded in October 2018. Graduates of the school receive a bachelor's degree in social science and the humanities, as well as a diploma in public policy. The Civil Service Commissioner has approved it as a cross-service program, and it is being promoted in collaboration with the Civil Servants' Union.

Approximately 340 students have thus far joined the program. The school provides content targeted to fit the needs of specific groups. In 2020, a group was set up for police officers in the Eilat area, to study Middle East Studies in a program tailored to the needs of the Israel Police. Another group in Or Yehuda combined criminology and gender studies with a social science and humanities curriculum.

New Study Centers and Teaching Institutions

In 2020, the local government program opened new study centers in Beit Shemesh and Yesod Ha' Maala.

After operating for many years under the auspices of the OUI Department of Study Centers, the Alliance and Tichon Hadash study centers are now managed by the Ramat Aviv campus.

The Library

In 2020, the OUI library acquired additional computer systems and upgraded existing ones. A new, user-friendly interactive website and smartphone app were launched. The site now has a FAQ section, with a search function based on keywords and topics. A new database management system allows users to connect to special resources that publishers and content providers have made available free of charge during the COVID-19 period.

The library has continued to expand its databases. Its new online subscription to *Haaretz* and *The Marker* is now open to faculty, students, and university staff. Otzar HaHochma, the largest digital online collection of 23,000 Jewish books scanned in their original format has been expanded to include all the fundamental scholarly works, as well as rare old volumes that are now accessible for the first time in hundreds of years. The library has recently subscribed to Rock's Backpages, a new database containing an archive of popular music journals, and to teaching films in biology from the JOVE teaching film collection.

In July 2020, the CEO Forum of University Libraries approved the Interlibrary Free Loan Project. This important move will enable research students to access items they need for research free of charge. The service is subject to copyright law, and is provided exclusively for learning and research purposes.

